Somerset Hills School District

Pathways to Success

September/October 2026



Superintendent's Corner by Dr. Brian Brotschul

Did you know that 1,909 incidents of bias were reported between January and October this year across 301 municipalities in New Jersey (including communities in the Somerset Hills)? Did you know those incidents address personal distinguishing characteristics found among our residents here in the Somerset Hills?

The Somerset Hills School District invited various Somerset Hills communities and stakeholders to examine these matters more deeply and to develop local solutions for the communities that make up this great area.

The working group is designed to examine and address hate across our communities and, further, to design and distribute a community-based resource for our schools, municipalities, elected officials, community volunteers (e.g., sports coaches, recreation advisors, youth group leaders) to support the residents of the Somerset Hills communities in navigating these challenging topics and discussions with our youth.

Our first session involved understanding the root causes of hate in our community and identifying the factors that contribute to it. We used a tool to organize and examine possible causes, move beyond individual incidents, and focus on developing long-term solutions.

In future sessions, we plan to share an analysis that identifies the most common and significant factors contributing to hateful behavior and incidents.

The Pareto principle (e.g., "80/20" rule) suggests that a small number of causes may account for a large portion of the problem, allowing us to focus our attention and resources where they can make the greatest impact. By collecting and analyzing data, we can recognize patterns, prioritize the issues that need the most attention, and develop targeted strategies to promote respect, inclusion, and understanding. Our goal is to address the root causes of hate, create meaningful solutions, and build a safer, more welcoming community for everyone.

During the winter/spring months, we will finalize a community resource for anyone who works with children to refer to when addressing harmful and hurtful speech. Whether you work in Somerset Hills School District, serve as a youth coach, or as a community-based volunteer, we all need to attack this challenge head-on and have a community resource for groups to adopt.

Thanks to this community-wide working group, we will have one.

Practice Makes Prepared
by Scott Wolfe and Arielle Rementilla



On October 14th, members of the Bernardsville Fire Department visited Bedwell Elementary School to talk about fire safety with all of the students and staff. Students had the opportunity to explore the fire truck, ask questions of the firefighters, and get their picture taken with their class in front of the truck. They learned a lot about what to do if there is a fire in their house, the importance of smoke detectors in every room in the house, and how to prevent a fire from occurring in the first place.

This is an annual learning opportunity at Bedwell and staff and students ended the day with a fire drill allowing all to practice evacuating the school in case of a fire. Although drills are done each month, it was particularly great to see how the students took what they learned in the morning with the fire department, and applied some of those skills during the drill. We are very proud of all of them for taking safety seriously. Special thanks to the Bernardsville Fire Department for their time and valuable information!

CKH Traction Days
by Lisa Garofalo and Dr. Scott Neigel

As part of the district's relationship with Capturing Kids' Hearts (CKH), both Bernardsville Middle School and Bernards High School had their first of two Traction Day visits with their CKH consultant. "Traction" days (or visits) refer to specialized, on-site consulting and coaching visits. These are designed to ensure schools implement the program effectively, maintain momentum or traction, and sustain its culture.

Bernards High School welcomed Kenny Kaye Hudson, who reflected on the school's recent implementation of the program. Throughout the day, she met with BHS counselors, student leaders, administrators, and teachers to discuss the progress made, and opportunities for continued growth. Hudson also joined Dr. Neigel for classroom visits, where she praised teachers for greeting students at the door, sharing "Good Things," and using social contracts to build positive relationships. Hudson was particularly complimentary of the school's climate and culture and applauded the staff for their commitment to embracing CKH practices. Her visit reinforced the positive impact these efforts are already having at BHS and the importance of continuing to build a school community where every student feels welcomed, valued, and connected. At BMS, in addition to meeting with building staff, Hudson had lunch with BMS' Culture and Climate Team, Dr. Brotschul, and building Administration. Over a pizza lunch, middle school students spoke about the positive hallmarks that Capturing Kids' Hearts has brought forth, not only to the school community, but to their lives outside of school as well.

Stay Well!
by Jamie Koransky

Our school district recently held staff flu clinics provided by our dedicated school physician, with the assistance of our school nurses. This annual initiative reflects our ongoing commitment to promoting the health and well-being of our school community.

By making flu vaccinations accessible to staff, we help reduce the spread of influenza and support a healthier school environment for both employees and students. Keeping our staff healthy also helps maintain consistency in the classroom, reducing the need for substitute teachers and allowing students to benefit from the continuity of instruction and familiar routines.

We are grateful to our school physician and school nurses for their time, care, and continued dedication to supporting the health of our staff and students. Together, these efforts help keep our schools healthy, safe, and ready for learning throughout the flu season.



From Fall into Winter
by Frank Riccio

Since the start of the school year in September, our Maintenance and Custodial Departments have been hard at work keeping our schools clean, safe, and ready for the changing seasons. As we transition from fall into winter, our teams have been preparing our buildings for colder weather, including checking heating systems to ensure our classrooms and facilities remain comfortable as temperatures drop. Outside, our crews have been busy maintaining school grounds, mowing grass, and managing the seasonal buildup of fallen leaves. We have also begun preparing and servicing our snow removal equipment so we are ready when the first snowfall arrives. These ongoing efforts help ensure our schools remain safe, welcoming, and fully operational throughout the fall and winter months.

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Do you know our
BHS Everyday Heroes?

Read about these special students in our District News!



You can also check out the *Everyday Hero* display case at Bernards High School!

Bernardsville Middle School 5th Graders Visit Brick Academy
by Dr. Michael Catelli



At the beginning of fall, Bernardsville Middle School students embarked on a trip to the Brick Academy in Bernards Township. The 1809 historic schoolhouse in Basking Ridge served as a private, and later public, school for the community. It is now the center of The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills and a museum modeling what an early 1800's school house would have looked and functioned like.

Bernardsville Middle School 5th graders study early American History with a focus on local history, so a visit to the historic school house was a great addition to the curriculum.

BHS students had a chance to see what children would have studied, historical "school supplies," and how classroom rules compare then and now. These opportunities allow students a chance to practice historical thinking and grow historical knowledge of their own community.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills provides multiple programs and events throughout the year, as well as opportunities for research. To learn more about the organization and upcoming events, visit their website: somersethillshistoricalsociety.org



Counseling Corner: Annual College Fair Returns Bigger and Better
by Dr. Jaime Walker

On October 8th, the annual Bernards/Ridge College Fair was held at nearby Ridge High School. The event was a success! Representatives from more than 120 institutions of higher learning including colleges/universities and branches of the military were welcomed by staff and families. The event provided students with a valuable opportunity to explore a wide range of postsecondary options, learn about academic programs, and gather information about the college admissions process. Representatives were available to answer questions, share insights about their institutions, and help students begin envisioning their futures beyond high school. This year, some of the longest lines were for University of Michigan, MIT, Vanderbilt, PITT, Penn State, Rutgers, and Virginia Tech.

The fair was well attended by students and families from both Bernards High School and Ridge High School, reflecting the strong interest in college and postsecondary planning within our school communities. We are grateful to the participating admissions representatives for their time and support in making this event a meaningful and informative experience for our students and families. Dates for next year's programming will be available in summer 2027.

The Unsung Heroes of Bernards Athletics:
by Jess McGinn



Fall sports at Bernards consists of all of the usual components...athletes, coaches, Friday Night Lights, PRs, wins and losses. That said, there are two individuals behind the scenes who make a marked difference in what it means to be part of the Mountaineer culture: senior, Ben Balian and junior, Macklin (Mac) Dunnder.

While Phil Nardone is the official voice of Bernards Athletics, Ben Balian is the student voice. Ben considers himself the "glue to the equation." Ben announces for many of Bernards home games, has a podcast "The Sports Pod" and is the go-to host of Senior Night celebrations. Ben first became interested in broadcasting when he attended a summer camp at Montclair State University during the summer of 7th grade. Ben summed up his impact by sharing, "I am happy to make the viewing experience better, make players feel special, and remind players that the games are about them." Ben hopes that he will be remembered for "being a positive voice" and would like to mentor underclassmen to carry on what he has started.

Ben intends to head to Syracuse University or the University of South Carolina to study broadcast journalism. He is realistic about the challenges he may face building a career in such a competitive industry, but there is no doubt the initiative he has shown at a young age is preparing him for great things.

Junior Macklin Dunnder, can be found on just about any Bernards sideline or sporting event with his camera. Mac's primary goal is "making sure all are seen." He appreciates that his pictures bring people together, create memories, and can even play a role in a player's recruiting process. Mac has come a long way from taking pictures of his little brother's club lacrosse games with his mother's camera. Mac made his BHS debut covering basketball his freshman year. Over time, he continued to upgrade his equipment on birthdays and holidays. Mac was influenced by 2024 BHS grad, Ari Rosen and learned alongside him. At some point, Mac has covered every sport at Bernards with the exception of the ski team. Mac's favorite memory of capturing BHS Athletics was the first boys' lacrosse game under the lights vs Pingry. The upgraded lighting made a big difference when covering an exciting game in the rain. He is not sure if photography is a part of his future, however it is certain that his pictures and videos are documenting innumerable memories. It is clear that Ben and Macklin are making a difference in amplifying Bernards Athletics!







IXL at BHS
by Lindsay Barna and Dr. Olga Edgerton

This school year, Bernards High School has implemented IXL, an online learning platform that offers benchmark assessments and real-time insight into student progress. The rollout gives students and teachers a new tool for building skills and identifying where support can make the greatest difference.

As part of the launch, students in grades 9–12 took IXL's LevelUp assessment in both English and Math. LevelUp is an adaptive assessment, meaning the questions adjust in difficulty based on how a student responds. Rather than assigning a score alone, it pinpoints each student's current skill level and highlights specific strengths and areas for growth. Results are then used to generate personalized recommendations, guiding students toward the skills that will help them progress most.

For teachers, the data offers a clearer picture of where students are starting the year, supporting instructional planning and targeted small-group or individual support. For students, it creates a clearer understanding of where they are in their learning process.

The LevelUp assessment is similar to the iReady diagnostic assessment already given to students in grades K–8 at Bedwell Elementary School and Bernardsville Middle School. Using comparable tools across these grade levels helps create a more connected, consistent view of student learning as students move from the

middle school to the high school. Bernards High School looks forward to using this information to support every learner!

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom: Pros and Cons
by Jeremy Schwarz

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming education by changing the way students learn and teachers teach. AI-powered tools can provide instant feedback, generate learning materials, and offer personalized support tailored to individual student needs. As schools increasingly adopt AI technologies, educators and students are discovering both the benefits and challenges that come with this new technology. While AI has the potential to improve learning experiences, concerns remain about its effect on critical thinking, academic integrity, and long-term educational outcomes.

One of the greatest advantages of AI in the classroom is its ability to support personalized learning. AI programs can adapt lessons to match a student's pace and learning style, helping struggling students receive additional support while allowing advanced learners to move ahead more quickly. Research reviewed by the Stanford SCALE Initiative found that students using AI tools often showed improved performance in mathematics, writing, and programming tasks when AI assistance was available. AI can also help teachers become more efficient by reducing time spent on lesson planning and other administrative tasks, allowing them to focus more on student engagement and instruction.

Despite these benefits, AI also presents several challenges. Studies suggest that students may become overly dependent on AI tools, relying on them to complete assignments rather than developing their own problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Research found that 55% of high school students and 61% of parents believe increased AI use could negatively affect critical thinking. Additionally, AI can be misused for cheating or generating assignments, making it more difficult for teachers to assess a student's true understanding of the material. Privacy concerns also exist because many AI platforms collect and store user data.

Although AI use in education has grown rapidly, there is still limited evidence showing how it affects long-term academic achievement and college readiness. Researchers have found that AI often improves performance while students have access to the technology, but results are mixed when students are later tested independently without AI support. Furthermore, there is currently no strong evidence that AI has significantly improved national standardized test scores such as the SAT or ACT. However, AI literacy is becoming an important skill for college and career success, with studies showing that many students now regularly use AI for schoolwork.

In conclusion, AI has the potential to make education more personalized, efficient, and accessible. However, it must be used responsibly to avoid overreliance, academic dishonesty, and reduced critical-thinking skills. When combined with effective teaching and thoughtful classroom practices, AI can serve as a valuable tool that enhances learning while supporting student readiness for the future.

Behind the Scenes
by Amy Cicenia



The Business Office continues to support district operations, oversee financial activities, and improve processes for the staff and school community.

As part of the district's ongoing referendum projects, the new gymnasium bleachers are expected to be ready just in time for the winter sports season! The Business Office continues to support these improvements by monitoring project budgets, tracking expenditures, and ensuring that referendum funds are managed responsibly so students, families, and community members can enjoy these upgrades.

The district's annual financial audit is also underway, with the Business Office working alongside independent auditors to review financial records, accounting procedures, and compliance with applicable regulations. This annual process plays an important role in maintaining financial transparency and accountability and ensuring that public funds are properly accounted for.

There has been significant progress in strengthening districtwide purchasing practices. The Board of Education formally adopted updated Standard Operating Procedures and a purchasing manual, and staff purchasing training has been conducted to reinforce these procedures. Together, these initiatives provide employees with clearer guidance, strengthen internal controls, and promote consistency and accountability across the district.

Our district Wellness Incentive Program funded by the School Health Insurance Fund has started off positively with 55 staff members completing their monthly wellness goals in September and 40+ in October.

The Business Office has also taken on an expanded role in support of the district's Transportation & Facilities Departments. From coordinating parent communications and responding to transportation inquiries to administering the Aid in Lieu of Transportation, the team continues to work collaboratively to support daily operations and ensure families receive the information and assistance they need.

Professional Development
by Dr. Olga Edgerton

Another successful session of our Professional Development Institute is underway. Each year, SHSD teachers have three opportunities to share their expertise by teaching a class to their colleagues. Our fall session bridges the past and the future, featuring classes like History in Your Backyard: Local History Resources, and Lesson Planning and Organization with AI. More than 30 teachers participated, taking advantage of the opportunity to support their professional learning goals, share knowledge, and discover something new!

Do you know our Board?



Mrs. Sam Frenda
Bernardsville, President

Mrs. Heather Santoro
Gladstone, Vice President

Mrs. LaShaunda Albert ~ Bedminster
Ms. Felicia Ballard ~ Bernardsville
Mrs. Holly Clark-Emery ~ Bernardsville
Ms. Nicole Cooper ~ Gladstone
Mrs. Mindy Hoppe ~ Far Hills
Mrs. Kelly Hunt ~ Bernardsville
Mrs. Allicen Librera ~ Bernardsville
Mrs. Pat Wry ~ Bernardsville

Our next public BOE Mtg is November 18th at 7:30 in the BHS Community Room.

Anticipated Openings

for 2026-2027

Teaching BHS
#818 Leave Replacement Math
(December - February)

Teaching BMS
#829 Leave Replacement Art
(March – June)

Paraprofessional BES
#828 Lunch Aide

SUBSTITUTES
#293 Nurses: $225/day
#492 Custodians $18/hour
#656 Maintenance $20/hour
#491 Bus Drivers $34/hour
#426 Teachers $130- $140/day
#705 Paraprofessionals $18/hour

For more information,

visit our Human Resources page

or email HR Specialist

Kathy Mehan at kmehan@shsd.org.

Read all about it!

You can access the District News section to read fun and informative articles about all of our campuses! Simply click here to catch up on highlights about our students, staff, events, and more!







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SHEF: A Favor for a Friend. A Gift for Our Schools.

A tale by Olga Christie: Chair, Somerset Hills Education Foundation

While preparing for SHEF's 30th anniversary celebration, I was trying to arrange a loan of seasonal plants from a local landscaping company and needed a personal introduction. I decided to call a neighbor and grandfather who knew the business well, and asked him to help. Within hours, we were on a conference call.

"Okay," the landscaper told him, "but I'm doing it for You!"
"That's alright," my neighbor replied, "because I'm doing it for Olga."
"And I'm doing it for the Kids," I added.

We laughed. But that little exchange captured something I've come to think of as the "grandparent effect": the relationships we build over a lifetime can open doors for people we haven't even met yet.

For 30 years, the Somerset Hills Education Foundation has brought people together to fund innovative educational opportunities for our district's students and teachers. Parents and grandparents have so much to bring to that work, including skills and connections hidden in plain sight.

Perhaps you know how to write a grant, manage a budget, organize a project or make an introduction that gets things moving. There's a place at SHEF for what you know and care about. This season of gratitude, consider joining SHEF as a volunteer or prospective trustee. Let's talk about what interests you and find you a seat at the table. Please share this invitation with the grandparents in your family and neighborhood. Sometimes, all it takes is being asked. You may contact me directly at 917-848-3864 to start a conversation. Thank you and Happy Thanksgiving. ~Olga Christie



A Note from Sam Frenda, SHSD Board President

As a Board of Education, our role is in governance and oversight. We set goals and policies and receive updates regularly by way of data reports and application, implementation of curriculum, policies/regulations, programming, and their respective successes. We ensure that we are always moving towards achieving our goals; and if not, we focus on what changes may be required to continue moving in the right direction. We are never involved in the day-to-day operations of the district as that is the job of our Superintendent and Administration. We rarely get to experience firsthand the way our decision-making is being directly applied in classrooms from the teaching and learning perspective.

In our last round of goal setting and strategic planning, culture and climate throughout the district was a primary goal, and of paramount importance, for the Board. We always recognize that the very best curriculum, facilities, resources and programs cannot meet their full potential and drive achievement if our students and staff do not feel safe, supported, empowered, and understood. That is why we made the choice to invest resources in the Capturing Kids' Hearts program throughout the district. We began at BMS and implementation is now well underway at BHS, with Bedwell soon to follow. However, feeling so strongly that a positive district-wide culture is the bedrock of all other success in the Somerset Hills, the Board was eager to directly understand and experience the implementation of CKH in our buildings.

With the support of Dr. Brotschul and the Capturing Kids' Hearts team the Board took part in a training in April and August that was specifically designed for us with tools to help further develop ourselves as leaders. We began by understanding the importance of embedding a process for how we interact with each other, identifying the needs of others, lowering fear and anxiety, creating common practices and ensuring that we are telling one another what we appreciate and respect about them in an intentional way. The training culminated with the Board developing a social contract using the same process implemented in our classrooms with our students.

Moving forward this contract will be displayed during our public meetings and referenced by members regularly. We want to lead from the front with positive and meaningful processes and communications. We want to share "Good Things," tend to our agendas with fidelity, and clearly communicate our intentions and expectations. Capturing Kids' Hearts informs that "the lowest level of behavior we accept becomes our culture." That is not just true of the district as a whole, but the Board itself. We are fully committed to the success of our students and staff and want to lead by example. As we move forward, we hope that you will continue to engage with us and provide feedback to help us continue to grow a culture of shared success where everyone feels valued and heard.